



# CATAWBA COUNTY

## Public Health

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### **HOT WEATHER CONCERNS**

When the temperatures soar into the 90s and higher, individuals need to take extra measures to protect themselves from heat related illnesses.

"Heat related illnesses can be a real problem for older adults, infants, and individuals who are obese or suffer from chronic illnesses," said Tracey Paul, Health Educator at Catawba County Public Health. "Individuals employed in occupations requiring outside work, such as field laborers, construction workers or lifeguards are also highly susceptible to heat related illnesses."

Prickly heat or heat rash is a common nuisance for infants. A rash develops on the skin where sweat may build up. To avoid heat rash, reduce the amount of clothing the infant must wear in hot weather, and change diapers and give sponge baths more frequently.

A drain of the body's fluids and salt due to increased sweating causes heat cramps, another side effect of the extreme heat. Heat cramps usually affect the muscles of the arms, legs and abdomen. To treat heat cramps, gently massage the muscle affected, drink one to two glasses of slightly salted fluid and rest.

Heat exhaustion is caused by prolonged and profuse sweating, which in turn disturbs the blood flow to major organs. In the body's effort to cool the skin, blood is shunted away from the major organs. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include profuse sweating, normal or nearly normal body temperature, pale, clammy skin, and possible cramps, nausea, dizziness or fainting. First aid for heat exhaustion involves placing the victim in a cool place to rest with their feet elevated. The victim's clothing should be loosened, and they should drink a slightly salted drink if conscious. Seek medical help.

"Heat stroke is the most life threatening of the four heat related illnesses," Paul said. "Without immediate first aid or medical care, this condition can be fatal."

Heat stroke occurs after profuse sweating drains the body of vital fluids to cool itself. The external and internal body temperature increases. If the internal body temperature continues to increase, heart and kidney failure, brain damage, and death occur. Symptoms of heat stroke include hot, dry skin; rapid pulse; a temperature of 105 degrees F or higher; and possible unconsciousness.

The immediate first aid measure is to reduce the body temperature. This can be accomplished by placing the victim in a tub of cold water (do not add ice); sponging the bare skin with cool water, and applying cold packs or using fans or air conditioners to promote cooling. It is important to prevent overcooling of the victim once his or her temperature goes below 102 degrees F and to seek immediate medical attention.

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General safeguard measures everyone can take to avoid heat related illnesses include:

- Avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Wear loose and light-colored clothing.
- Drink plenty of liquids, possibly as much as 50% more than normal thirst requires.
- If you anticipate a lot of activity, drink extra fluids—don't wait until you are thirsty.
- Drink fluids that contain a mixture of salts and minerals, unless you are on a salt-restricted diet.
- Beware of certain medications (i.e. tranquilizers) that can increase the risk of heat stroke. Consult a doctor for advice on this issue.
- Try to stay out of direct sunlight, especially during the hottest part of the day;
- Try to stay in a cool, well-ventilated area. Use fans to circulate the air (remember to keep them out of reach of children). People without air-conditioned homes might want to visit an air-conditioned building such as a library or shopping mall.

Ms. Paul points out that people are not the only ones who can suffer from the heat—animals can, too. “If you have pets, be sure that they have a cool, well ventilated place and access to water. If your pet stays outside, it is important to ensure they have a shaded place and plenty of water to protect them from the heat,” Paul added.

Another potentially life-threatening situation is leaving a pet locked up in a vehicle, even if the window is cracked. The temperature within the vehicle can increase enough to become extremely hazardous or even fatal. So remember to play it safe as you try to keep cool this summer!

For more information on extreme heat, health effects and air quality, visit these web sites:

<http://www.epa.gov/heatisland/about/healthenv.html>

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/elderlyheat.asp>

<http://www.emergencyemail.org/newsemergency/anmviewer.asp?a=231&z=7>

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